

An Ounce of Prevention

By SUSIE BOUCHELLE WIGHT
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"Now, Tom, dear," said little Mrs. Ellis, handing him a cup of coffee, "I have something serious to say to you."

"Yes?" Mr. Ellis' tone was notably absentminded. He was looking at the alluring curve of her soft white arm. She had the cunningest way of giving her big sleeves a twitch to keep them out of the way as she passed anything at table, and this morning the sleeve was a great silken one embroidered with Japanese iris. However, for her own good her husband had not told her all her attractions for him. Not knowing his train of thought, she observed only the preoccupation in his tone. This confirmed her in the wisdom of her determination, but it also gave her a queer little disposition to let down the corners of her mouth.

"Well, it is only this, Tom," she proceeded, her eyes studiously avoiding his. Preoccupation in his tone was bad enough; to recognize it in his eyes would be intolerable. "You see, we have been staying so closely together since the wedding, now three whole months. Aren't you just a little afraid we are overdoing the devoted? When I see so many married couples who are just as happy away from each other, or more so, I dread the time." Her lip quivered, but this time Mr. Ellis was giving his attention to the smooth whiteness of her neck. He did not answer, and in a moment she went on in a steeper voice, "You remember the 'ounce of prevention' case?"

"Word's pound of patent medicine, isn't it?" he replied frivolously, and when she proceeded gravely her voice had shaded down to actual wistfulness.

"For fear, Tom, that our happiness should lose some of its tone in such constant association as ours I have been thinking that maybe it would be better not to see each other quite so often. I couldn't bear to see that you were growing tired of me."

"Her infinite variety," he began to quote, but she interrupted him with a lift of the kimono clad arm that set his thoughts adrift again. "We must consider the subject seriously, dear," she said softly and plaintively. "Suppose we plan deliberately to keep new to each other by taking some of our pleasures away from each other."

"Goodness, Betty!" he exclaimed. "I thought we were married in order to enjoy ourselves together."

"We did, but see how people get after a few years. The Thomases, now, for instance—how different they are! And yet I am old enough to remember that they were perfectly selfish together at first. There are the Ripleys too. They are congenial and apparently the best of friends, but Mrs. Ripley doesn't seem to mind at all that her husband spends the greater part of his time away from her. It is only that I dread such a phase in our life."

He looked at her in surprise. Who would have thought her capable of such serious consideration of a life problem—this pretty creature of sunshine and smiles? Just then a thought popped into his mind. Suppose she were already getting tired—just a little bored with him! It would be like her to contrive some tactful way of telling him. And then Betty had been a belle there had been a score of fellows dancing attendance upon her, even up to the very day of the wedding. Perhaps she was feeling dull, and no wonder, with such a poor stick as he as her only companion, even if she did love him as she professed. He pondered a few moments, making a great secret, while trivially engaged in sipping his fragrant breakfast coffee. When he spoke his tone was cheerful.

"Well, Betty darling," he remarked, "that had not occurred to me until you spoke, but you are right. There is danger of overdoing the devoted, and we mustn't get tired of each other—we just must not! I have not been to the club since the wedding. I will go there to dinner this evening, and you must accept one of your numerous invitations. You have Dolly to go with you, and I will send a carriage to be at your disposal for the evening."

"Yes," acquiesced Betty in a small voice, keeping her eyes upon her plate. She had not expected her ideas to be adopted with so little protest, and it was not cheering to find herself so correct in her forethought.

He looked at her sharply for a moment, then came over to her side of the table and kissed her goodby most affectionately. She longed to tell him that it would seem like a month for him to be gone until late that evening before she should see him again, but no—if he was already feeling the pull of the silken chain that bound them together she must not let him know that she was aware of it. She sprang merrily up, went with him to the door, chattering about this and that, as though her every thought was not of the evening that was going to be so lonely without him. When he turned back at the corner for a last look the wave of her small hand was positively hilarious.

The day crept by. At first her impulse was to remain quietly at home for the evening, but he was going to the club, and she must not be behind him in carrying out the plan.

She accepted Mrs. Ripley's invitation to hear Nordica with her. In the afternoon she dressed and went to a tea, wasted some hours over a visit to her

dressmaker and when evening finally came she arrayed herself for the sacrifice. It was no fun at all to find out her golden hair when there was no one there but Dolly to remark upon the effect, and then Dolly was painfully matter of fact. She would wear the violet silk with the yellow lace cascades, even if there was nobody there to tell her it was the prettiest dress that ever a pretty woman wore. It was a sort of solemn satisfaction to be making herself lovely without the encouragement of an admirer sitting over in that big chair, his knee over the arm and a cigar in his mouth, but at the mental picture she smothered an irrepressible sob. Dolly looked at her acutely.

"I believe I am about to take cold," faltered the little mistress mischievously. "My—my throat feels so queer."

When she entered the box and threw her great white cloak in a luxurious heap in the chair behind her, Mrs. Ripley glanced over her with a look of decided approval.

"You were never prettier, Betty," she whispered, "and then it is so sensible of you not to be foolish about having Tom Ellis dangling after you every where you go."

"That is what we agreed only this morning," said Betty in a burst of confidence, and then she grew suddenly silent.

Her eyes, sweeping the crowded house, had fallen upon Tom Ellis in a group of men down near the footlights. As the moment went on she began to feel aggrieved that he did not even glance toward the Ripley box, although he surely had known of the invitation. She was glad when the music began, because her throat still had that queer feeling, and her lips wanted to tremble. Nordica's superb presence and her singing failed for the first time to absorb Betty's attention. She would not look again at that group down near the stage, but she could not keep from seeing them in her mind's eye. She was glad there were others in the box, who felt like talking. She did not want Mrs. Ripley to regard her too closely after the drop of the curtain. The hum of conversation began in a moment, and she half turned toward those near her, seeming to listen, although she heard not a word. Still she would not look below her.

"Boo!" came a frivolous exclamation at her shoulder, and she started violently. The rich blood surged into her face. She did not need to see whose hand was resting on her arm.

"Why, Betty Ellis," cried one gay voice, "you don't mean to tell me you are actually blushing over Tom, you ancient married woman, you! The blushes are for the buds."

"Then they are for Betty," said Tom gallantly. "What rosbud ever looked sweeter than she does this minute?"

"Tom!" she remonstrated, and he laughed and sat down beside her.

When the others were absorbed in themselves again he whispered to her: "Forgive me, Betty, if I bored you by coming. I just couldn't help it. I had forgotten all about the Ripley invitation until I saw you in the box. I came along just to be doing something."

"Don't," she begged, and the eyes that were lifted to his were full of tears. He covered her hand with a moment with his and waited; then, when she had stily wiped the moisture from her lids and had swallowed that troublesome lump, she whispered: "I was just mistaken after all. I don't believe in preventive measures like this. We are not tired yet. Let's just wait until we are."

"Dope, Betty!" he agreed rapturously. "You are so sensible!"

"Sensible!" interrupted Mrs. Ripley, turning quickly at the word, which had drifted to her ears. "Isn't she so, Tom? I was just telling her a little while ago that she was most remarkably so."

The two accepted the unmetted praise unblushingly and looked at each other with a happy laugh.

Stories From Java.

In Java the European "resident" of a government station is a very important personage, to whom great homage is rendered by the natives. A story is told of one resident who was thrown out of his dogcart while descending a hill. He had barely recovered from the stunning fall when he caught sight of his secretary—who had been following in his own carriage—coming bounding down the steep road like a big india rubber ball, rolling over and over in the dust. "Hello, have you been upset, too?" asked the resident. "No, resident," spluttered the fat little secretary, scrambling to his feet again. "But I thought if the resident leaps I leap too."

During a cholera scare another resident invited a widow to remove to a high hill as a precaution against the disease. She, however, said that she thought her time to die had come, and as her husband had been a person of importance in his lifetime she asked only for the inestimable privilege of having her grave dug next to the resident's own.—Chicago News.

The Cunning Girl.

Once upon a time there was a cunning little girl who had three strings to her bow or three beaux to her—but you may state it as you please—and she treated them so shrewdly that each one thought he was the own and only. She was a very cunning little girl, was she not? Yes, but after a time each one of the three began to nurture a dark suspicion that he was being played with, and so they went away and began to go with Susan Boggs and Mary Jones and other girls, and now the cunning little girl is an old, old maid, who feels very sorry that she was so cunning, and this is all there is to the story except the—

Moral—Cunning little girls who play with the fire too long may find in the end that they have less flames than they had when the fire was brightest.—San Francisco Call.

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